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No Small Territory for Me

1 Chronicles 4:9-10

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This morning I want to begin revisiting the Prayer of Jabez. You will remember the prayer: 'O Lord, I pray that you will bless me indeed (I say, 'Big Time!), that you will enlarge my territory, that your hand will be with me, and that you will keep me from evil." I know there have been some criticisms of this prayer. Some have suggested that it is too much the formula, as if to suggest that one can pray the prayer and have things happen by themselves, without any intervention by God. Some say it is part of the discredited 'health and wealth gospel,' the notion that God wants everyone to be healthy (always) and wealthy (wouldn't it be nice!). Well, I appreciate the criticisms because they help bring into relief what the prayer is and is not about. Sometimes, though, you just get tired of all the 'talking heads' on television.

Simply, the prayer of Jabez is about ministry. It is about doing more ministry for God. The second part of the prayer, which I want to focus upon this morning, is the most misunderstood part. 'O God, I pray that you enlarge my territory.' Jabez looked at the land he was given and felt that he could do more for God with more land, so he asked for more. The key to the prayer of Jabez is right here. It's not in the getting but in the asking.

Enlarge my territory. Expand my borders. Give me more opportunity. Why? To make a (greater) mark for God, for Jesus. What have I been saying over the past two years about the goal and purpose of our church? We exist to glorify Jesus Christ and to become effective witnesses to him. When we accept our role as disciples and 'be' Jesus in the place where we are planted, we begin to utilize the spiritual gifts we have been given. When we utilize our spiritual gifts (discover them, develop them and use them), we begin to function as the body of Christ, enabled to do what Christ did, the preaching that leads to salvation AND the signs and wonders in support.

As I have said over and over (but don't mind saying over and over!), God wants to do work through us in a partnership with us. Although God could do whatever he wants, I believe the thing he wants the most is our desire to be used by him for his glory. That's all Jabez is saying in this prayer - God, use me more. Give me more territory so that I can use more toward your glory.

Say you are a business-person. You may ask for more territory, more business, if you run your business God's way. God may bless you with lots of income, which usually indicates God is also giving you a spiritual gift of giving. God is giving you more success so that you can pass on your successful income to his church. Others may be praying for more territory in their personal evangelism, in their success in sharing the Good News with others. Or others, perhaps housewives, are praying for God to expand the boundary of their influence upon other mothers to talk about orienting life toward the Lordship of Christ. It's about people using their Holy Spirit-given spiritual gifts to build up the body - but more, really, it's about expanding and enlarging the body through the individual partnerships God provides. The body doesn't sit down with some butcher paper and

decide to expand itself - the individual members of the body ask of God for expanded opportunities, enlarged territories, increased boundaries in their individual areas of influence.

The author of the little book talks about a young man named Warren. The author had come to the college in southern California that Warren attended, and taught about the prayer of Jabez. Warren and a friend heard the challenge, and decided that the following weekend they would drive to Sacramento and witness to the governor of the State. So they did. They ended up witnessing to several gas station attendants along the way, security personnel at the capitol, the director of health and human services, the governor's secretary, and finally to the governor himself. They thought their plan was crazy but they knew the plan came from God, and they took God seriously, and began their trek.

The author also speaks about how he came to that small college and challenged the student body to take an island somewhere on the planet, and organize a summer long mission trip to that island, charter a DC-10 and go. Are you crazy? Students charter a DC-10? But that's just what happened. Students and faculty spent a summer on the island of Trinidad doing vacation bible schools and street evangelism and teaching in local churches. Warren was involved in this second effort too.

What happened? They asked for enlarged territory. God said yes.

At the recent Dunamis conference I attended with 9 other CPCers, we focused on spiritual warfare, you know, deliverance ministry and exorcisms and evil spirits and demons and of course the powerful Kingdom of God. On the last night, Saturday night, there is always a time for receiving anointing to do ministry - to be prayed for to be a prayer intercessor, or to be prayed for to be involved in healing ministry. As you might imagine, a call went out to those who would like to be anointed and prayed for to be involved in ministries of spiritual warfare. How many people from our Team do you think wanted to get his kind of anointing? Yep, zero. So, feeling duty-bound, I went into the center aisle that I might, as the pastor, be anointed to received discernment, the most necessary spiritual gift in deliverance ministry. I did notice a few others from our group there in the crowded center aisle, so maybe somebody changed their minds, I don't know.

The main leader came by and prayed for me to have (greater) discernment for this area. I felt the hand of the Lord upon me. Then the leader came back and prayed that I enlarge my ministry by engaging what he calls the current apostasy of the PCUSA (our parent denomination) in my writing (a gift I seem to possess). A bit later he came by and prayed that I expand my boundary and receive the gift of prayer ministry leadership. I was feeling a bit overwhelmed at this point. Julie looked at me and said, 'How bout that Tom!' And I wondered how bout that for quite some time.

Then I remembered that as God gives opportunities and expanded influence and enlarged borders and boundaries, he also gives supernatural abilities and resources. That as we pray for enlarged territory, we can sense God pleasure at our request, AND God's desire to work through us. Along with his pleasure and desire at our request to partner with him in the work of ministry, God gives us additional capabilities to do what will be done. Every time.

This is my sermon this morning - you have some territory God has already entrusted to you. It's not only right to ask for more. I believe God is waiting for you to ask for more! So do it today or tomorrow. Take him seriously and ask for enlarged territory or expanded influence or more opportunities, and watch how he responds with both an enlargement AND the supernatural abilities you need to succeed.

Isn't this exciting?

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